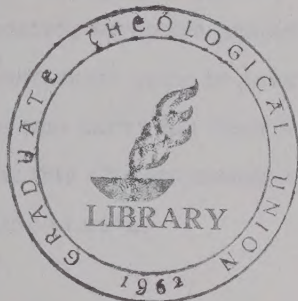


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CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 1979by The Rt. Rev. John M. Allin
Presiding Bishop/Episcopal Church

"It's 10:20 and the boys are supposed to be there early for the Choir. . . hurry up, Dad, and make certain the tree lights are turned off. . . everybody out to the garage and into the car. . . ."

And so another family leaves for church on Christmas Eve. They drive down Elm Street, passing a brightly lighted house where neighbors are giving a party. These neighbors won't be going to church. As the family car enters the business district, an old man is seen hovering under a street light, a small cup in his hand that is outstretched to the few who are passing by. The signs in a department store proclaim the post-Christmas bargain sale that will begin on December 26: "Where wise men and women are led by the stars after Christmas. . . ."

The car is parked in the lot behind the parish house and the organ music is heard as they climb the steps to the old stone church building. They enter a pew, guided by the candles that flicker in the chancel and along the aisle. Fresh greens fill the air with pine scent. Old Mrs. Drindle chatters loudly to those near her in the first pew.

It is Christmas Eve and this family has become a part of that larger family -- the Christian Church at worship -- as they gather to sing praises to the babe of Bethlehem, hear His holy word proclaimed and receive Him in the sacrament.

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My hope is that as we gather before the altar this Christmas, we will not forget we are part of a world that includes the neighbors who stay at home, the old man begging for coins, the department store cashing in and old Mrs. Drindle who chatters loudly. In truth, may the light of Christmas enable us to see the unseen faces of the refugees and outcasts, the hungry, neglected, forgotten people in the shadows of the world. That is the world the babe of Bethlehem came to save and we gather at God's altar to enable us to be the messengers who carry the Good News and power of that salvation. May you be richly blessed at this Christmastide as you serve the One who came among us by serving those He came to save.

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